

Argus Courier - Community Profile - Margarethe Kircher

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Community Profile

41 YEARS LATER, BIRTHS STILL EXCITE NURSE

MEET MARGARETHE KIRCHER, LONGTIME REGISTERED NURSE IN THE FAMILY BIRTHING CENTER AT PETALUMA VALLEY HOSPITAL

By DAN JOHNSON
ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

Although Margarethe Kircher has helped to deliver several hundred babies while serving as a registered nurse for over 40 years in Petaluma hospital birthing centers, she still feels that each one is special.

“Every birth is different, and as long as I have an excited feeling afterward, I’ll keep doing it,” she said.

Kircher now assists with labor and deliveries at Petaluma Valley Hospital, generally one day per week. She was in charge of the maternity area there from 1980 to 2000, after serving in the same post at Hillcrest Hospital for 10 years.

When Kircher retired from her full-time position in 2000, she received a proclamation from Mayor Clark Thompson that acknowledged her contribution to the community.

She became vividly aware of the importance of health-care workers as a young girl while battling scarlet fever in her hometown, Hadamar, Germany.

“That experience made me want to help the sick,” she said.

As she reached adulthood, however, she aspired to become a painter or a cellist. Kircher eventually heeded her parents’ advice to forsake an artistic career by attending St. Mary’s Frankfurt Nursing School. In 1960, the year after she received her RN credential, Kircher relocated to San Francisco, where her brother, Julius Herbst, was living.

After working as a maid and a nurse’s aide, Kircher received her California nursing license and began working at Mary’s Help Hospital, now Seton Medical Center, in Daly City. On a trip to Germany, she met her eventual husband, Dieter, and they moved to Petaluma in 1964.

“It was a less expensive place to live than Marin County or San Francisco,” Kircher said.

She began working in the medical-surgical and maternity areas of Hillcrest in March 1966 before being promoted to head of the maternity ward four years later.

Kircher announced the birth of every baby on KTOB radio station, and became known as the “Stork Mother” of Petaluma.

“The people loved the announcements,” said Kircher, who obtained a bachelor’s degree in health services administration from St. Mary’s College in Moraga.

During the past 41 years, she has seen major changes in medical technology and patient preferences.

“For one thing, there has been a shift from women wanting a natural childbirth. More of them began wanting to be medicated,” Kircher said.

Although PVH steadily has grown, she feels that it has maintained an intimate, personal environment for mothers and their babies.

“We are still a small hospital, and try to keep it family-oriented,” she said. “We always have a very good staff, with minimum turnover, and a fantastic community.”

She often sees mothers around town who she has helped with their childbirth.

“It seems as if everyone shows up when I go to the supermarket — and they remember me,” she said.

Kircher, who has two children of her own, plans to soon celebrate a particularly joyous birth.

“My first grandchild is on the way, and will be born in December,” she said, smiling.

(Contact Dan Johnson at dan.johnson@arguscourier.com)